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AN OVERVIEW OF PROJECT LEER--BOOKS IN SPANISH FOR PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN THE UNITED STATES. (TITLE SUPPLIED).

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ALTHOUGH ACCURATE FIGURES ARE NOT AVAILABLE, SOME ESTIMATES PLACE THE SPANISH SPEAKING POPULATION OF THE U. S. AS HIGH AS 9 MILLION. THE PLIGHT OF THE SPANISH SPEAKERS HAS BEEN SERIOUSLY AFFECTED BY THE CHANGING LABOR MARKET WHICH IS DEMANDING MORE SKILLED LABOR. THE LANGUAGE BARRIER IS THE PRINCIPAL DETERRENT KEEPING SPANISH SPEAKING PEOPLE FROM CLIMBING THE ECONOMIC LADDER BECAUSE IT IMPEDES THEIR LEARNING PROCESS. HOWEVER, IN RECENT YEARS THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING THEIR CULTURAL HERITAGE AND TEACHING THEM THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE HAS BEEN RECOGNIZED. LIBRARIANS HAVE FOUND THAT THE READING LEVEL OF THE SPANISH SPEAKERS IS CONSIDERABLY BELOW THAT OF ENGLISH SPEAKING RESIDENTS AND THE TYPE OF READING MATERIAL NEEDED IS NOT READILY AVAILABLE. AS A RESULT, PROJECT LEER WAS ESTABLISHED FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMPILING AND MAKING AVAILABLE LISTS OF SPANISH LANGUAGE BOOKS FOR PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARY USE. AS SOON AS DETAILED CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED, THE SELECTORS WILL BE NAMED AND GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR DETERMINATION OF TITLES TO BE INCLUDED IN THE ANNUAL SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHIES TO BE ISSUED ON A SUBSCRIPTION BASIS. (ES)

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PROJECT L E E R :

BOOKS IN SPANISH

FOR PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES

IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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PROJECT LEER:

BOOKS IN SPANISH FOR PUBLIC AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES IN THE UNITED STATES*

by

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Project LEER: Its Pre-History

"Aquí se habla español." This sign appears in countless shop windows throughout the United States to entice and aid Spanish-speaking clients. There are some areas so thickly populated with Spanish-speaking people that an occasional sign reads "English spoken here." Perhaps an expert in consumer marketing might be able to calculate more accurately than others have been able to do just how many whose first language is Spanish live in Continental United States. Conservative estimates say 5 million, yet others say as many as 9 million.

Many of the Spanish-speaking adults, however, would not be able to read either of the signs, in English or Spanish, and many more would not be able to read and understand a longer sentence, much less a book, in Spanish. Yet the Spanish-speaking population of the United States, exclusive of Puerto Rico, and allowing only the minimum figure of 5 million, is larger than 12 of the countries of Latin America, almost as large as three, and only considerably smaller than that of Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru. Only the metropolitan areas of New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles have a larger total number of inhabitants, and large portions of these cities are Spanish-speaking. About 100,000 Cubans came to these shores in the last year alone.

Figures for the number of school children principally of Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Cuban parents vary proportionately with the estimates on the number of the total population. Some 800,000 of them are in schools in New York State, a half million in Texas. Children of Mexican migrant

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* LEER for "Libros Elementales, Educativos y Recreativos," or READ in Spanish for "Reading for Education And Diversion."

workers are to be found in sizable numbers as far north as Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota. Miami, Los Angeles, and New York are virtually bilingual cities. Oakland, California, has a Spanish-speaking population of 40,000. The Washington, D. C. metropolitan area has between 70 and 80,000 residents.

Even more accurate statistics than these, however, would not by themselves explain the present-day interest among educators, librarians, community and political leaders as well as the historians in the present-day Spanish-speaking population of the nation. Those who think of the United States as a purely "Anglo-Saxon" country not only ignore the contribution of other nationalities and ethnic groups to the historical and cultural development of the nation, but tend to forget that a large portion of the land, most of that west of the Mississippi and our southernmost land mass -- Florida -- has a Spanish heritage. Or that Spanish colonies existed in North America a century before English ones. Those who would know of the historical sources and background of half of our country must be able to read it in Spanish. We have on "free associated state" which is Spanish-speaking -- the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Our southern border is virtually bilingual. Our Canal Zone transverses Spanish-speaking Panama.

Furthermore, the State of New Mexico has always accepted Spanish officially, its Constitution is written in Spanish as well as in English, the two languages can be spoken in the courts, and some 29 percent of the population of the State is Spanish-speaking. Spanish-language radio stations and newspapers abound in New Mexico. In 27 counties of the southwestern states more than 1/2 the population speaks Spanish as a first language.

Texas has officially recognized its Spanish heritage in the recent decree authorizing both English and Spanish as official languages of the state, and legislation has been approved calling for bilingual education in all Texas schools. California has provided that local school authorities may make exceptions to the general rule that English is the language of instruction in the schools. Bilingual schools are now prevalent in the State of Florida, with special programs in effect in Dade County. Recently, New York City came to the decision that Spanish-speaking children must be taught in their own language.

The plight of the Spanish-speaking adult in the United States, as well as that of other ethnic and language groups, has been made more serious by the changing pattern of the labor market. In the past there was a great demand for manual rather than educated and skilled labor, and for this market the non-English speaking laborer could compete. However, in the complicated world of today where machines and automation have taken the place of manual labor, the average worker has to master new concepts and techniques, become more skilled -- in thought as well as in work. To do this they must go to school, they must learn more, they must read more. They must learn to read in both English and Spanish. Spanish can be spoken as poorly as English, however, and there is as great a need for the Spanish-speaking to learn to speak their native language well as for them to learn to speak English well. Care

must be taken that bilingual children speak both languages equally well, and that they have access to books representative of their dual cultural background.

Facts show that it is principally the language barrier that blocks the Spanish-speaking person from climbing up the economic ladder because it impedes or interrupts his learning process. Although all levels of education are to be found among the Spanish-speaking residents of the United States, the average reading level for some parts of the country is fourth grade, and seldom ascends to the eighth. Educators and librarians must, therefore, share with government officials the responsibility of seeking a remedy to the situation confronting them at this very moment.

Only in recent years, however, has it been generally recognized that it is as important to preserve the cultural heritage of these people as to teach new immigrants the "American way of life" and the English language as it is spoken here, that they should be as proud of Simón Bolívar, of José Martí, of Luis Muñoz Rivera and of Benito Juárez as of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, as familiar with Cervantes as with Shakespeare.

"It is now recognized," reports the House Committee on Education and Labor, "by educators, business, and civic leaders, that foreign languages and cultures can contribute to the national unity of the United States. One Congressman said he no longer thought of the country as a melting pot, which tends to homogenize all the various elements, but instead as a mosaic which gains its beauty and strength from variety and diversity."

Attitudes toward language and culture have changed markedly as our Nation has developed and as the United States has been forced to play a more conspicuous role in world affairs. Our problem today is a dual one -- that of making it possible for the younger generation to understand the problems of the rest of the world with which we are so intimately involved, and in so doing to give them a basic knowledge of other peoples and of their languages, and that of educating Spanish-speaking children who reside in the United States into full American citizenship while at the same time preserving their own cultural and language heritage.

Legislation enacted in recent years has proved that the Congress has been aware of these subtle but forceful changes. Furthermore, books have been recognized by Congress as important in imparting knowledge, and libraries as being essential institutions and services for getting books into the hands of those who need them -- even in languages other than English. This has permitted public librarians to experiment with imaginative programs to provide reading materials in Spanish to support adult education, literacy, and vocational education programs, services to migrant

agricultural workers, assistance to the Job Corps, to the Office of Economic Opportunity, and similar activities carried on with the assistance of Federal funds.

Librarians have found that the reading level of the Spanish-speaking population in general is considerably below that of the English-speaking residents, on the average at a fourth-grade level. Educators and government officials, when they have analyzed the reasons for the low school achievement of the Spanish-speaking adults, have come to the conclusion that the prevailing custom of requiring a child from a Spanish-speaking home to speak and read only in English from his first day at school, and often punishing him if he spoke the language of his parents even on the playgrounds, could no longer be condoned. If he is to be expected to learn English well, he must first learn his own language well.

School librarians have hade some limited funds from Federal sources for the procurement of reading materials for the "culturally disadvantaged children" in very recent years.

Congress, in January 1968, under the forceful leadership of Senator Ralph Yarborough of Texas, and with strong support from colleagues from many states with large Spanish-speaking populations, approved an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as Title VII to be cited as the "Bilingual Education Act." They prefaced the act with these findings of Congress:

"Sec. 701. The Congree hereby finds that one of the most acute educational problems in the United States is that which involves millions of children of limited English-speaking ability because they come from environments where the dominant language is other than English; that additional efforts should be made to supplement present attempts to find adequate and constructive solutions to this unique and perplexing educational situation; and that the urgent need is for comprehensive and cooperative action now on the local, State, and Federal levels to develcp forward-looking approaches to meet the serious learning difficulties faced by this substantial segment of the Nation's school-age population."

As for a Declaration of Policy, the Congress sustained:

"Sec. 702. In recognition of the special educaticnal needs of the large numbers of children of limited English-speaking ability in the United States, Congress hereby declares it to be the policy of the United States to provide financial assistance to local educational agencies to develop and carry cut new and imaginative elementary and secondary school programs designed

> to meet these special educational needs. For the purposes of this title, 'children of limited English-speaking ability' means children who come from environments where the dominant language is other than English."

Funds from the Federal government for bilingual education programs will include the acquisition of necessary teaching materials for these programs.

The presence of ever-increasing numbers of Spanish-speaking people has posed serious problems to American librarians who have long sought solutions to the needs of library service on behalf of various ethnic and other groups speaking languages other than English. School libraries, as well as public libraries, must adequately provide for books and other materials supplementary to the curriculum and of interest to the Spanish-speaking children and young people. They must also supply materials to aid in teaching Spanish as a second language in basically monolingual as well as in bilingual schools, and to provide necessary background information on the countries and cultures of Latin America and Spain if bilingual programs are to be successful and if President Johnson's admonition to prepare our citizens for our worldwide responsibilities is to be met.

To solve these current problems libraries must draw upon the knowledge of librarians familiar with the types of cultural backgrounds from which these young folks come and be able to aid them in bridging the two cultures. These librarians also need to be familiar with the literature of the Spanish-speaking nations and with books of a nonfictional nature issued in the Spanish language for the purposes of curriculum enrichment. Unfortunately, only a handful of librarians here or elsewhere can be called expert in the field, although at least two institutes have been held under the National Defense Education Act on library services to bilingual children, and many institutes have been offered for teachers on topics related to Latin America. Much research is needed in various areas such as the reading needs, interests, and abilities of the Spanish-speaking adults and children.

The reading needs of the adult population varies, of course, in accordance with his educational and cultural background, the historical development of the country from which he or his parents emanated, and whether he is an urban or a rural dweller. A wide difference is known to exist even in the linguistic patterns among the Cubans, the Puerto Ricans, and the Mexican-Americans. Although large numbers of each of these groups may be found scattered throughout the country, the Mexican-Americans are chiefly located in the Southwest, the Puerto Ricans in New York, and the Cubans in Florida. The Cubans present a more diversified educational background in general than do the others, including a high percentage of professional people who are highly literate in Spanish, although they may be only beginners in English. The Mexican-Americans, referred to in official circles as those "with Spanish surnames," may even be third-generation Americans from communities still retaining the Spanish tongue.

Many came to this country as migrant workers. Many of their children have dropped out of school from discouragement caused by their language and ethnic dissimilarity from the "Anglos," and they have failed to achieve adequate training for the present-day labor market.

There is for the librarians and educators the further problem of the supply of books in Spanish appropriate for libraries. Book publishing and distribution is not organized in Latin America in such a form that it can yet be called a "booktrade." This makes it difficult for an individual library or library system in the United States to procure books once titles have been identified and a selection made of those considered to be appropriate. Books are published in short editions and go out of print quickly, making it frequently impossible for a library to obtain such titles after they have been selected and ordered. Attempts by individual libraries to procure books from publishers and jobbers in these countries, requiring correspondence in Spanish which is frequently unattended because of underdeveloped sales procedures and local barriers of one kind or another, have met with less than satisfactory results. Rapidly changing exchange rates have complicated their bookkeeping. Reliance on local dealers in the United States has not been too successful.

Furthermore, little attention has been paid to the production and publication in Spanish of books for children or young people or for adults with a limited reading ability, because, among other things, publishers have considered the market too limited for economic gain. Profits are too low for them to consider publishing easy-to-read materials for new literates, and materials which have been published have usually been produced by government agencies and philanthropic adult education and literacy programs. There is little in the way of children's literature written originally in Spanish.

The almost total lack of school and public libraries has contributed to the underdeveloped state of book publishing and distribution. Whereas in the United States more than 90% of children's books find their way into libraries, this market does not exist in Latin America to encourage publishers to issue more books for children. The production of essy-to-read materials for new adult literates by commercial publishers is a new idea even in the United States, and few have been willing to risk it without the assurance of the purchase of large quantities by public agencies for specific educational programs.

Librarians in Latin America are, of course, faced with the same and other problems. Their reading problem is complicated by the population growth and the inability of the countries to build enough schools and prepare enough teachers to educate the population. Not more than half the population gets to school in the first place and half of them drop out by the second year. Up to the present time books have not been considered an essential element of the educational process, and an inordinate number of schools possess none because the governments have not supplied them. At issue is the problem of how to provide books for the children and adults of the Americas who do learn to read so as to prevent a lapse into illiteracy either because they drop out of school or because they do not have free and easy access to books graded to their reading ability, intellectual development, and interests.

Unfortunately for the librarians in the United States and Latin America, the bibliography of Latin America in general is chaotic and incomplete, although the coverage for Spain is considerably better. The compilation of standard lists of Spanish materials appropriate for libraries in the United States as well as in Latin America is indispensable for the formation of collections for Spanish-speaking children. Equally necessary is the compilation of standard lists of easy-to-read materials for adults appropriate to the Spanish-speaking adults in the United States. It has been reported that in 1960 only 4.6 years of school had been completed by persons with Spanish-surnames in Texas. In Latin America few countries can boast of more than 12-15% of their adolescents enrolled in secondary school.

Required for the compilation of these selection lists are librarians not only with a knowledge of the reading interests of children and adults, but with a familiarity with Spanish cultural backgrounds and with the sources of materials in Spanish. Most of the books and magazines required for school and public libraries will have been published in Latin America and Spain, some issued as translations or in original form in the United States and Puerto Rico. Some of the books appropriate for schools will be translations of books by United States authors. But there are today no lists of works in Spanish published in the United States. Furthermore, much of what has been published in Spanish for the beginning reader is not to be found in the commercial market, and therefore difficult to identify.

The bibliographic problem, and the availability of selected lists of books appropriate for public and school libraries, is seen to be only one of many problems involved in the provision of reading materials in Spanish. The Seminars on the Acquisition of Latin American Library Materials* in an attempt to facilitate the procurement of research materials by U. S. libraries, found bibliography and acquisition to be part and parcel of the same process. They therefore encouraged a Latin American Cooperative Acquisitions Project (LACAP), maintained by Stechert-Hafner, Inc., to purchase all newly published books in order to be able to compile the current bibliography of Latin America.

Books for public and school library uses must also be procured by one means or another. Because of the poor quality of the binding and paper, many books must be rebound for library purposes. Some materials useful with adults at the 4th to 8th grade reading level or for literacy and post-literacy programs are not of a usual library nature (i.e., booklets and comic books), and it may be found necessary to bind several pamphlets together for library purposes. Not many libraries have personnel competence to catalog and classify adequately a large volume of Spanish materials. Some libraries serving a large Spanish-speaking population or a bilingual school in the United States may require cataloging entries and subject headings in Spanish. This would seem to call for a centralized processing service, to add to those of a bibliographic and procurement nature.

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* Annual meetings sponsored since 1956 by the Pan American Union.

The complexity of the problem of how to create a means of filling the reading needs of the Spanish-speaking population of the United States and Latin America turns, therefore, on the varying aspects of identifying books published in Spanish for children and for adults with a minimum reading ability, selecting those appropriate for school and public libraries, procuring sufficient quantities of these titles in print to fill the library need, binding and giving special handling to special kinds of materials, providing a centralized cataloging and classification service especially in Spanish, offering a centralized processing service, and making it possible for interested libraries to take advantage of these services.

From the search to find a satisfactory way out of the dilemma, Project LEER was born.

Project LEER: The Story Up to Now

Project LEER came into being as a new activity in the international book and educational fields with the formal signing on October 20, 1967, of an agreement to compile and make available lists of Spanish language books selected for public and school library purposes. The ultimate objective of Project LEER was announced to be that of assisting librarians in the United States and Latin America to procure the kinds of reading materials in Spanish they need for their actual and potential clientele. Project LEER is a joint effort of the Bro-Dart Foundation and the Books for the People Fund, Inc., with the collaboration of the Pan American Union. Signing for the Foundation at the ceremony in the Pan American Union was Mr. Arthur Brody, President, and on behalf of the Fund, Mrs. Marietta Daniels Shepard, its Chairman and Chief of the OAS Library Development Program.

The first activity of Project LEER, and one which will continue, was immediately initiated by Miss Martha Tomé, Director of the Project, provisionally housed in the Pan American Union. This involves establishing and maintaining contact with commercial and noncommercial publishers so as to obtain review copies of their books and other elementary reading and instructional materials in Spanish appropriate for school and public libraries. Expert selectors will review the materials for the compilation and publication of annual lists of selected titles for library purposes. This joint effort serves the objectives of the Bro-Dart Foundation created for the purpose of compiling bibliographies and other aids for libraries and of the Books for the People Fund, Inc., whose purpose it that of stimulating the production and use of children's books and elementary reading materials for adults.

Publishing houses, bookstores, government agencies, and private enterprises engaged in issuing post-literacy and popular materials were visited in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Colombia. Letters were written to similar entities in other countries of Latin America and Spain. The Instituto Nacional del Libro Español responded by calling the attention of its members to Project LEER and inviting their collaboration. There was an immediate response to the call for assistance to satisfy the reading needs in Spanish of the United States, and boxes of books by the hundreds began to roll into "La Casita" in the Pan American Union where its Library Development Program is carried on.

Discussions of the problem of selecting materials for U. S. libraries were held with librarians responsible for selection in many of the large library and school systems in the United States, with officials of the U. S. Office of Education, and with members of American Library Association committees working on compiling lists. Samples of types of materials being assembled by Project LEER were taken to the Miami Beach Midwinter Meeting of the American Library Association in January 1968 and many interested in easy-to-read materials in Spanish came to see them and discuss their problems. The urgency of the need for some public and school libraries to purchase materials for immediate consumption forced Project LEER to prepare some preliminary "pre-selection" lists of titles in print considered by the Project staff on the basis of its conversations regarding needs to be appropriate for library purposes in the United States. These titles were purchased in quantity by Bro-Dart Industries for distribution to interested libraries. In some instances payment is being made to some noncommercial publishers in rolls of paper rather than in money to permit them to reprint the books or booklets on better paper for future consumption.

The first issue of a Project LEER Newsletter to include titles in stock is ready for publication.

In the meantime the Pan American Union engaged in a market survey to ascertain the probable need and market for the bibliographic service, as well as for a commercial procurement service and possibly a centralized processing service. Form letters with return postals were sent widely to public and school libraries to seek this information, and to determine whether or not there is a need for cataloging in Spanish as well as in English. In addition, covering letters were sent to state libraries, state superintendents of schools, ESEA coordinators, and to others engaged in educational and community programs to request additional information on specific programs being carried out by libraries to serve their Spanish readers, and to cooperate with other adult education programs, serve bilingual children, and for the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language as well as English to the Spanish-speaking. An analysis is now being made of the returns from these form letters and it is anticipated that a report will subsequently be made on them.

Ready for distribution by the Pan American Union to those libraries and agencies demonstrating interest in Project LEER is an extensive questionnaire to seek more specific information on the nature of the public to be served by elementary reading materials in Spanish, and on the reading needs and interests both of children and adults. Findings of this questionnaire are expected to provide much more specific information on the kinds of materials most needed for library use in the United States. It will facilitate the determination of definitive detailed criteria and guidelines to be used in the selection process for the annual basic lists, given the characteristics of materials presently available and the need to reach people who are not regular library users and who will have to be reached by unusual means and unusual library materials.

Project LEER: Its Future Development

As soon as detailed criteria and guidelines have been established for consideration by expert selectors, these selectors will be named and given the responsibility for the selection of titles to be included in the annual selected bibliographies to be issued on a subscription basis. It is hoped that the first expertly selected bibliographies of works in print, available from Bro-Dart Industries among others, will be ready by the end of 1968. The regular "pre-selection" of new titles and the annual selection process for the basic lists will continue in the years to come in much the same way as in the initial phase.

Both the Pan American Union and Project LEER will collaborate with the U. S. Office of Education and with other agencies of the Government in stimulating new programs to satisfy the reading needs of the Spanish-speaking residents of the United States. With State and local libraries and agencies they hope to collaborate in organizing and holding seminars and institutes on the reading needs and interests of this segment of the population, and how to supply them.

Experimentation by Bro-Dart Industries in the cataloging of materials in Spanish as well as in English will determine whether or not the cost involved makes this proposed activity of Project LEER feasible.

The expansion of Project LEER into an Inter-American project is but a matter of time. Agencies working for the improvement of Mexican-American relations have demonstrated an interest in the procurement of selected titles in Spanish on the United States for "book-kits" to present to schools along the border in Mexico. Private organizations and associations working toward good will in the Hemisphere and to assist in the developmental progress of Latin America have indicated an interest in the activities and services of Project LEER. Many government officials in Latin America have expressed the hope that some aspects of Project LEER might be carried out in Latin America and that their countries might be able to take advantage of the services offered. Delegates to the meeting of the Inter-American Cultural Council in Maracay in February expressed enthusiasm for the project and the hope that additional assistance might be given to it by the Organization of American States through a new Regional Program for School and University Libraries approved by it as a part of a new Regional Program for Educational Development.

The existence of a ready market in the United States, in dollars, for children's books in Spanish and for popular reading materials for adults is expected to increase the attention on the part of publishers to the production of better-quality and larger editions of books. Project LEER will make it possible for Books for the People Fund, Inc., to become more effective in its efforts to stimulate the production of quantities of easy-to-read materials for new adult literates as well as for children.

These are all somewhat mundane aspects of the larger expectation of the intellectual and even spiritual results of providing people with reading materials in their own language, in accordance with their reading interests and needs, and by so doing creating a better America--North, Central, and South.